

## **New Hunterdon Board Deputy Director Calls For Strategic Parks Use Plan**

Newly sworn in Hunterdon County Board of Commissioners Deputy Director Zach Rich said county parks are a key responsibility of the Board and called for the development of a new strategic parkland use plan, during remarks at the January 18<sup>th</sup> Board meeting.

Rich, who participated in the January 4<sup>th</sup> Re-organization meeting by phone because he was quarantining after a covid-19 close contact, was sworn in as Deputy Director on January 14<sup>th</sup> by the new State Assembly Republican Leader John DiMaio, from Hunterdon County's District 23.

The new Deputy Director, who is also serving as the Board's liaison for the Parks Division this year, stated, "Parks have never been more important than right now, during the pandemic, as people wish to get out into the clean, open spaces of our parklands."

Rich, entering his third year on the Hunterdon County Board, said, "The conservative fiscal philosophy of this Board is well established, and every decision made here, the very first thought is what will it cost and what will the impact be on taxpayers. The county government, however, also has a responsibility to our residents to ensure services are being delivered, and parks are a key area of that responsibility.

Rich continued, "Parks, wooded areas, viewscapes and open spaces are very much a major part of what makes Hunterdon County a great place to live. Park trails are highly valued by joggers, walkers, horseback riders, our seniors, and nature lovers.

And, in line with Director John Lanza's plan to encourage tourism, our parklands also play an important role in the tourism marketplace."

Rich requested support from the other Commissioners, "to move forward on the development of a new strategic parkland use plan, working off the open space strategic plan adopted in 2018, that will set in place a future strategy for the continued enhancement of our park assets."

Rich, who formerly served as Mayor and a Township Committee member in West Amwell, added, "We should invite various stakeholders to participate in the

process, partnering with our municipalities and our non-profit conservation and environmental organizations, in an effort to enhance local parks and creating a synergy with county spaces.

The County needs to examine opportunities for having the right playgrounds and recreation equipment, in the right spaces for children, with particular emphasis on playgrounds that are accessible for all children.”

Rich concluded, “Parks are a major asset for the County that have a far-reaching impact on Hunterdon County’s quality of life, tourism economy, and future. In order to maximize their value, we should secure their proper stewardship and use, ensuring they are part of what keeps Hunterdon County the best place to live.”